

## **DEMOCRACY, DIVERSITY, AND CONFLICT**

### **Religious Zionism and Israeli Foreign Policy**

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### **Introduction**

Israel's disengagement from the Gaza strip in 2005 marked a momentous turning point in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people. After 37 years of occupation, Israel has pulled out from this densely populated strip of land at the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, but it still keeps its military control over all access to the Gaza strip via land, sea, and air. The new government of Ehud Olmert is now debating the next step: to retreat from large parts of the West Bank. While presenting the concept of unilateral disengagement as a necessary step towards peace with the Palestinians, Ariel Sharon and his successor Ehud Olmert made it very clear that, on the other hand, Israel intends to keep and even expand the major Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Olmert's convergence plan reflects these intentions by openly announcing that the settlement blocs would remain a part of the State of Israel forever. But for a certain portion of the Israeli population, this is not enough. In the run-up to the Gaza disengagement, Israel was flooded with Orange – the colour that the disengagement opponents chose to mark their fierce protest against the evacuation of Jewish settlements. Settlers in orange T-Shirts gathered in mass demonstrations, waved Israeli flags with orange ribbons, blocked main roads in the midst of rush hour, quarrelled with security forces and tried to convince soldiers to refuse orders during evacuation. A small minority even threatened to violently resist the evacuation of their homes.

The protests were ideologically accompanied by public statements made by the political and spiritual leadership of the settler community's religious hard core, arguing that the government is about to abandon the Land of Israel, given to the Jewish people by God himself. The settlers' campaign against disengagement, though not entirely the work of religious people, was clearly marked by a strong religious undertone that draws on the allegedly eternal bond between God's chosen people and its promised land. In its extremist version this religious-messianic ideology holds that the settlement of the Land of Israel by the Jewish people is a prerequisite for redemption and the coming of the Messiah. Therefore, abandoning the land is against God's will – and Ariel Sharon was breaking *halakha*, the Jewish law. This ideology stands in stark contrast

to the liberal ideas and norms that, according to democratic peace theory, should guide a democracy's foreign and security policy towards peaceful conflict resolution. While the majority of Israelis support the disengagement as well as the establishment of a Palestinian state on the grounds of these liberal ideas, the religiously underpinned opposition of the settlers and right-wingers against any concessions on the territorial question is a formidable obstacle to the resumption of negotiations between the two conflict parties.

This paper starts with a brief discussion of the democratic peace, thereby identifying a blind spot in this strand of liberal theory regarding the impact of modern politicised religion. To make up for this deficit, the broader literature on religion in International Relations and conflict research is reviewed for its main insights concerning the relationship between religion, politics, and conflict. From the synthesis of these two fields of research, the question follows whether politicised religious actors might contribute to spoiling the democratic peacefulness and preventing non-violent conflict resolution. This question is then applied to the Israeli case. To understand the background of the current ideological rift in Israeli society, the paper traces the origins of two competing versions of the Jewish national project, a secular-liberal and a religious one. While religious Zionism was of less relevance during the formative years of the state, it started to play a major role in the decades following the June war in 1967, with the settler-community at its forefront. The peace process in the 1990s deepened the cleavage between the secular and the religious camps, which were now increasingly identified with either dovish or hawkish political standpoints. By way of coalitional and lobbyist politics, the small religious parties gained a disproportionately high influence on government policies. Obviously, the religious-nationalist camp took advantage of the openness of Israel's democratic society and political system, thereby undermining its proposed democratic peacefulness.

## **I. Politicised Religion Within the Framework of Democracy – A Threat to Democratic Peace?**

### *Democracy, Peace and War*

Democracy has become a focal point of the global political debate. Supporters and critics, the industrial nations of the West as well as the developing countries, the ones at the giving or at the receiving end of democratisation – all refer to democracy as the most popular

and seemingly most successful political system in the world. Almost two thirds of the world's 192 states are presently democracies, at least on a formal basis (Inglehart 2003, 68). Democracy raises high hopes: it is expected to allow for the participation of citizens in political decision processes, to restrain the use of power, protect human rights, secure internal peace, and enhance and distribute the state's welfare. (Offe 2003, 152–153; Schmidt 2000, 522–528). In addition to these internal accomplishments, democracies also enjoy a good reputation in international relations. In comparison to other types of government, democratically ruled states are less apt to use force in international conflicts. The empirical finding that democracies don't fight each other is one of the most robust and popular results of International Relations.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this so-called 'separate peace', a number of studies have gathered data that hint towards a general tendency of democracies to prefer non-violent means of conflict resolution.<sup>2</sup> Some authors even formulate the expectation that the increasing number of democracies will produce international socialization effects that might eventually lead to a global peace culture (Harrison 2004). Democratisation, therefore, is considered the prime strategy to contain war and conflict in the international system – a strategy that has been turned into a political agenda by the world's leading democracies.

How this distinctive democratic war aversion can be explained is subject to much debate in democratic peace theory. The legacy of reasoning about the relationship between democratic government and foreign policy has its roots in modern liberal political thought, with one philosopher standing out for first formulating a systematic theory on democracy and peace: Immanuel Kant. In his seminal work "Perpetual Peace," the German philosopher argued that citizens would vote against war if they had the opportunity to participate in the decision making, because otherwise they themselves would have to bear the costs and casualties of war (Kant 1995 [1795]). This simple utilitarian argument, which is based on a cost-benefit-calculation by welfare-oriented citizens, is complemented by a normative explanation. Also stemming from Enlightenment's liberal tradition of philosophy, this explanation depicts man as being endowed with

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<sup>1</sup> For reviews of the democratic peace literature, see Chan 1997, Geis 2001, Hasenclever 2003, Levy 2002, Russett/Starr 2000.

<sup>2</sup> See Benoit 1996, Czempel 1996, Rousseau/Gelpi/Huth 1996, Rummel 1995, Russett/Oneal 2001.

dignity, reason, and moral power of judgement.<sup>3</sup> These characteristics enable citizens to learn and comply with peaceful rules of conflict resolution within their own democratic societies. Moreover, the theory holds that citizens will also prefer non-violent means of solving crises in the international realm since their fellow human beings in other countries are entitled to the same universal rights. Though contemporary democratic peace research has come up with a variety of different explanations that incorporate other variables, such as the reciprocal perception of states as being democracies or international organisation and economic interdependence, these basic utilitarian and normative preferences of citizens, which are rooted in modern liberal thought, remain at the heart of democratic peace theory.<sup>4</sup>

But just as the euphoric record of democracy's accomplishments in domestic politics has come under scrutiny by scholars who discuss the ambivalences and shortcomings of democratic government without disavowing its normative desirability (Buchstein/Jörke 2003, Offe 2003), the democratic peace thesis has recently received a critical reformulation. Taking into account the interventions and wars fought by democratic states in the years following the end of the Cold War, a new generation of democratic peace scholars has begun to take a fresh look at the theory. They show contradictions and ambivalences inherent in the theory itself; they point out to the transformed parameters in the international system which change the cost-benefit-calculations when it comes to decisions over war and peace; and they remind us of the Janus face of modernity itself, which is *inter alia* expressed in liberalism's ambivalent stance on the use of force.<sup>5</sup> By pointing out these contingencies and ambivalences, these scholars question the simple equation that liberal ideas, norms, and preferences internalised by democratic citizens always lead straight to peaceful behaviour of democratic states in international relations; rather, the conditions have to be specified under which democracies unfold either their peaceful or their belligerent poten-

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of Kant's "Perpetual Peace" and his conception of the nature of man, see amongst others Brandt 1996, Czempel 1998, Habermas 1996, Patzig 1996. For an introduction to Liberalism, see Bernbach 1986, Döhn 1998, Schieder 2003, Zacher/Matthews 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Other explanatory approaches abound in democratic peace theory – though many reviewers of the literature still find them unsatisfactory. See for an overview Müller/Wolff 2006.

<sup>5</sup> For this critical research, compare Geis 2006, MacMillan 2004, Müller 2004, 2002, Owen 1994. For the ambivalence of modernity towards violence, compare Joas 2000.

tials. The “democratic distinctiveness” (Owen 2004) regarding peace *and* war has eventually entered the community’s research agenda.

### *The Democratic Peace and Religion*

Following this critical line of argument, I will discuss a variable that the liberal philosopher Immanuel Kant thought would lose its grip on politics in the continuous process of enlightenment and be limited to the sphere of metaphysics (Lincoln 2003, 57–59) and that has since been neglected by Kant’s heirs in democratic peace research: religion. Since the 1970s, with the Iranian revolution sending out the most visible signal, the world is witnessing a strong trend towards religious orientation of a growing portion of its population. In the literature, this trend is generally referred to as a ‘resurgence of religion.’<sup>6</sup> The fact that religion not only has not faded away but continues to thrive contradicts the expectations articulated by leading figures in philosophy since the Age of Enlightenment, such as Kant, as well as by the classical social theories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These thinkers believed that in the course of modernization religion would fade in importance and eventually become completely insignificant. “The death of religion [...] has been regarded as the master model of sociological inquiry, where secularization was ranked with bureaucratization, rationalization, and urbanization as the key historical revolutions transforming medieval agrarian societies into modern industrial nations” (Norris/Inglehart 2004, 3). Religion was expected to be replaced by rational, secular, scientific and judicial methods to understand and run the world (Fox/Sandler 2004, 10). The secularization thesis became one of the few theories that has been granted paradigmatic status in the social sciences (Casanova 1994, 17). Only recently have scholars begun to revise secularization theory in the face of the ample evidence for a global resurgence of religion.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the emergence of highly politicised fundamentalist religious groups and movements in different societies has helped to catch the attention of sociology and political science for the written-off phenomenon of

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Moghadam 2003, Berger 1999, Falk 2003, Fox/Sandler 2004, Norris/Inglehart 2004, Willems/Minkenberg 2002.

<sup>7</sup> While some researchers suggest dismissing secularization theory altogether (Berger 1999, Stark/Finke 2000), others argue that it still applies to some regions and societies, but fails to explain the global trend and therefore needs reformulation (Casanova 1994, Norris/Inglehart 2004).

religion<sup>8</sup> and its impact on politics. In the discipline of International Relations, Samuel Huntington's provocative thesis of a looming clash of civilisations that are primarily defined by religion (Huntington 1993, 1996), has sparked a vivid debate about the role of religion in international conflicts and civil wars.<sup>9</sup>

Yet the theorists of democratic peace have been largely unaffected by this evolving field of research.<sup>10</sup> The disregard of democratic peace research for the phenomenon of modern politicised religion might have its roots in the historical evolution of the theory itself. The gradual decrease in importance of religion in public affairs, as delineated by secularisation theory, is one of the constitutive elements of liberalism. Even today, the strict separation of religion and state is a basic tenet of liberal theory. This also applies to the international realm, where the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 serves as a cornerstone of liberalism's mythology by providing the historical date when religion was allegedly banished from international affairs forever: "... the modern state, the privatisation of religion, and the secularisation of politics arose to limit religion's domestic influence and minimise the affect of religious disagreement, and end the bloody and destructive role of religion in international relations" (Thomas 2000, 819; see also Fox/Sandler 2004, 10–12). Therefore, liberal theory, as well as its offshoot democratic peace theory, suffers from a 'genetic blindness' regarding the impact of religion on politics.<sup>11</sup> But neither the general resurgence of religion, nor the rise of fundamentalist movements within the great religious traditions, stops at the borders of democratic and democratising states. Rather, such tendencies can be observed in democracies such as the United States, Israel, the Philippines, or India. Esposito/Voll have rightly identified religious resurgence and democratisation as the two most important global trends at the turn of the millennium (Esposito/Voll 1996, 11). This leads to the question

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<sup>8</sup> The most comprehensive research project regarding the global phenomenon of fundamentalism, the Fundamentalism Project, is documented in five volumes, edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. Marty/Appleby 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995.

<sup>9</sup> For a critical review, compare Chiozza 2002.

<sup>10</sup> With the exception of Russett/Oneal who subject Huntington's thesis to a statistical test and conclude that "peace does not depend upon moral conversion, therefore, but is ultimately derived from calculations of self-interest. Civilizations play little role in this." Russett/Oneal, 269.

<sup>11</sup> Petito/Hatzpoulos make this point for the whole discipline of International Relations: "The rejection of religion, in other words, seems to be inscribed in the genetic code of the discipline of IR" (2003, 1).



whether religion – and especially its politicised, often nationalist version – has an impact on the specific war aversion of democracies as proposed by democratic peace theory.

### *Politicised Religion and Conflict*

The relationship of religion and politics is a complex and diverse field of social research. Different vantage points can be chosen in order to structure the variety of ways in which religion locates itself in relation to politics. A natural starting point is to look closely at how people who are calling themselves ‘religious’ express and practise their beliefs in the context of modernity.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, most religious groups and movements react in one of two ways to the alleged linkage of modernity and secularization. Though this assumed link has been proven to be mistaken by the deprivatization (Casanova 1994) and desecularization (Berger 1999) of the world, it informs the two main strategies of religious groups towards modernity: They either define “modernity as the enemy, to be fought whenever possible,” or they view it “as some kind of invincible world-view to which religious beliefs and practices should adapt themselves” (Berger 1999, 3). A third reaction is based on the rejection of the intellectual premises of modernity, but embraces aspects of modernity such as technology, communications, market economy, or natural sciences.

This basic distinction between rejectionist and adaptive strategies towards modernity often overlaps with the ways in which religious groups relate to the secular state. Some of the rejectionist groups simply retreat into a subcultural form of existence, separating themselves from society and refusing any active participation in politics. But a growing number of groups seek to dissolve the strict separation of religious and political spheres as prescribed by Western liberal tradition. Wilcox/Jelen divide the political roles of religion into two general categories: “*priestly* religious politics, in which church and state may stand in a mutually supportive relationship to one another, and *prophetic* religious politics, in which political and religious authority may assume opposed or independent roles” (Jelen/Wilcox 2002, 7). Some of the prophetic religious movements might even try to gain control over the state apparatus or impress their religious norms and beliefs on the whole of society. Lincoln proposes a model that has two poles “between which lies the more complex, variegated, and realistic middle ground in which most

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<sup>12</sup> A typology of contemporary forms of religious expression could also be based on their position within the broader religious tradition, using labels such as conservative, liberal, messianic, syncretistic, or mystic.

historic and social experience actually transpires” (Lincoln 2003, 59). One pole is the religiously maximalist form of culture, where religion dominates all social, political, and cultural aspects of life; the other, then, is the minimalist form, as it was formulated by Enlightenment philosophers, which at most allows religion to play a role in the private sphere of citizens. Haynes differentiates four categories in his typology of “religiously inspired entities”: culturalist groups, defined by religious and ethnic affinities, strive to achieve self-control, autonomy, or self-government; syncretistic groups blend features of different religions as well as social symbols in order to enhance group solidarity in the face of a potentially hostile state; fundamentalist groups perceive modern politics and society as a threat to their way of life and aim to “change the laws, morality, social norms and sometimes the political configurations” in accordance to their religious norms; and local community-oriented groups concentrate on self-help improvements in their personal lives and the local community (Haynes 1994, 5–6).

The different typologies – and there are more of them available in the literature – demonstrate the diversity of modern religion and its impact on politics. For the purpose of this paper, which deals with the role of religion in conflict, Appleby’s differentiation of religious militants being either peacemakers or extremists seems to be quite useful. Though admitting that using the term ‘militant’ for a peacemaker seems to be counterintuitive, Appleby argues that religious peacemakers are actually engaged in warfare – yet a spiritual one in contrast to the extremist who is ready to resort to physical violence. Nevertheless, both types “‘go to extremes’ of self-sacrifice in devotion to the sacred; both claim to be ‘radical,’ or rooted in and renewing the fundamental truths of their religious traditions” (Appleby 2000, 11). In terms of Lincoln’s categorisation, both extremists and peacemakers favor a maximalist position. This distinguishes them from non-believers as well as from the middle-ground of ordinary believers. The main difference between the two types is found not in the use of violence per se, but in the goal that the religious actors seek to achieve: While peacemakers are committed to reconciliation or peaceful coexistence, extremists simply want to win over the enemy, “whether by gradual means or by the direct and frequent use of violence” (Appleby 2000, 13).

A second way of structuring the religion-politics nexus is to look at the ways in which religion actually influences politics. In Haynes’s simple formula, there are “two basic ways in which religion can affect the temporal world: by *what it says* and by *what it does*” (Haynes 1998,

4). *What religion says* can be found in holy scriptures, theology, doctrines, sermons, and the like. The traditions of the major religions provide a rich reservoir for political interpretations of religious texts and thereby serve as an important source of legitimacy (Fox/Sandler 2004, 35–45). Legitimacy defines what is and is not beyond the pale, as well as providing a means for policy makers to justify their actions. Therefore the beliefs, norms, and values that make up the intellectual and spiritual content of religion readily lend themselves to being transferred to the political realm. But caution is in order when dealing with the political reading of religious texts. Appleby coined the term of the ‘ambivalence of the sacred,’ basically stating that the same religious tradition can be used to justify very different or even contrasting political actions (Appleby 2000; cf. Bruce 2003, 5). That is why both peacemakers and extremists can base their political actions on the same religious traditions. Religious legitimization also has its limits because it only resonates in a homogeneous public that understands and adheres to the same religious tradition that the speaker is invoking in order to bolster his argument. *What religion does* refers to religion as a social phenomenon that shapes individual and collective identities and forms specific groups, movements, institutions, and organisations. The social expressions of religion encompass local communal as well as big transnational organisations, political parties, religious courts, institutionalised state-religion relations, and the like.

The impact of what religion says and what it does can be observed on all levels of politics, including international relations. The latter are affected in two ways, as Fox/Sandler point out: by way of linkage politics, which encompass the impact of domestic religious actors, issues, and conflicts that tend to transcend national borders; and through transnational phenomenon, such as religiously-motivated terrorism, internationally proselytising religious organisations, or issues on the global agenda like human rights (Fox/Sandler 2004, ch. 4 and 5). The identification of linkage politics as one of the two main ways in which religion influences international relations provides an excellent starting point for connecting democratic peace theory and the study of religion and politics. Obviously, the interrelation of domestic and international affairs is an intersection of both fields of research. Yet so far this intersection has not been studied systematically. Therefore, the case study in this paper explores how religious actors who aim to blur the separation lines between private/religious and public/secular influence a democracy’s foreign policy in a situation of protracted conflict.

For this purpose, the argument is theoretically based on a moderate constructivist perspective on religion. The few scholars dealing with religion and its role in conflicts on a theoretical basis distinguish three main strands of thought in the literature – though they are rarely made explicit (Hasenclever/Rittberger 2003, 108–115; Thomas 2000, 12–13; Willems/Minkenberg 2003, 31–32). First, primordialist or essentialist theories view religion as one of the independent variables in the explanation of conflicts in and between nations. Religion is described as an essential, unchanging, and irreducible part of identity which distinguishes between communities, whether on a local, national or civilizational level. Therefore, conflicts between groups of different religious affiliation are considered to be almost inevitable and very difficult to rationally negotiate. Second, instrumentalist or modernist theories see religion as a mere epiphenomenon of the economic, political, and social conditions in a given conflict. Religious beliefs and identities are used by groups and individuals to achieve other, very worldly, political and social ends, but they don't constitute an independent cause for conflicts. And third, moderate constructivism defines religions as 'interpretive communities.' This approach recognises the dynamic and changing nature of religions which are "in dialogue with their members and with society on the contemporary significance of each religious tradition" (Thomas 2000, 13). Since constructivism argues that social conflicts are always embedded in cognitive structures that consist of shared understandings, norms, values, and worldviews,<sup>13</sup> religion is an important source for the interpretation of conflictive situations. Constructivists agree with instrumentalists that "most contemporary conflicts are conflicts about power and wealth and not about religion" (Hasenclever/Rittberger 2003, 114). Also, they are concordant with the influential and decisive position that instrumentalists ascribe to religious and political leaders or 'norm entrepreneurs.' But constructivists hold that religions "are intersubjective structures that have a life of their own" (ibid.) and cannot be randomly instrumentalised for each and every political action whenever it suits political elites. Thus, they take up a middle position between essentialism and instrumentalism.

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<sup>13</sup> For constructivism in International Relations compare Adler 1997, 2002; Wendt 1995.

## Two competing national projects: Religious vs. secular Zionism

### *Democracy in conflict: Israel and the Palestinians*

In order to research the influence of politicised religion on the proposed peacefulness of democracies, Israel is an interesting case study. Since its inception, the State of Israel has exhibited a tension between liberal secular and religious norms as guiding principles for state and society. And for decades it has been involved in protracted and violent conflict with the Palestinians, culminating in the Al Aqsa-Intifada.<sup>14</sup> According to democratic peace theory one should expect that the Israeli democracy would prefer peaceful means in order to resolve the conflict with the Palestinians. But – without denying Israel its right to protect itself against terror attacks carried out by Palestinian terrorists – it is clear that Israel has repeatedly contributed to the violent escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by measures such as military retaliation, targeted killings, curfews, house demolitions, and collective punishment.<sup>15</sup> And, last but not least, the illegal occupation and settlement of Palestinian territory by Israel constitutes one of the major obstacles to peace in the Middle East.

What are the forces in Israeli democracy that push against a peaceful peace process based on bilateral negotiation? Many different factors would have to be included if a comprehensive answer were to be given to this question. Instead, the argument here focuses on one specific aspect, the influence of politicised religious actors. Following Hasenclever/Rittberger, religion is understood as a “causal factor intervening between a given conflict and the choice of conflict behaviour” (Hasenclever/Rittberger 2003: 115). While there are religious peacemakers in Israel who promote peaceful reconciliation<sup>16</sup> on the grounds of their religious faith, this article seeks to explore the emergence of religious extremists and their influence on foreign policy. As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is basically about territory, this central theme is a prominent feature in the competing frames of the conflict by the liberal-secular and religious camps.

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<sup>14</sup> According to the quantitative criteria of the Conflict Data Project at Uppsala University, the Al Aqsa-Intifada can be categorised as an intermediate armed conflict with more than 25 battle-related casualties per year and more than 1000 over the course of the conflict.

<sup>15</sup> The Israeli human rights organisation B'tselem documents these incidents: [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org).

<sup>16</sup> For example, Os ve Shalom and Rabbis for Peace.

*Sources for Competing Frames of the National Project: From the Emergence of Zionism to the 1967 War*

For the Jewish community in early modern Europe, the Jewish homeland – which they traditionally referred to as ‘Zion’ – was a very important religious image but did not evoke any hopes to actually return to and resettle the Land of Israel. “The longing for Zion did not disappear over the centuries but, like the appearance of the Messiah, was postponed until the dim and distant future” (Wald 2002, 100). The Land of Israel was an integral part of prayers and liturgy, but did not constitute a basic element of Jewish life and identity. Seen as a utopian territory, characteristics were ascribed to the Land of Israel that had nothing in common with the semi-arid region in the Middle East (Newman 2001, 238). The return to Zion was conditioned by the redemption through the longed-for Messiah. It was transformed into a spiritual rather than a practical, realistic hope. Until its fulfilment, the European Jews arranged themselves in their respective diaspora societies (Eisenstadt 1992, ch. 5).

When at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Zionism entered the stage of history, the Orthodox Jewish community had severe difficulties to integrate this secular nationalistic movement into its religious worldview. Theodor Herzl’s Zionism can be described as a specific Jewish answer to the challenges of Enlightenment, secularisation, liberalism, and nationalism. Avineri argues that early Zionism combined the best traditions of European liberalism with a modern and secular interpretation of the Jewish heritage, thereby formulating a pointed critique of the failure of European culture in the face of anti-semitism (Avineri 1999, 37; cf. Brenner 2002, 89ff). Yet to orthodox Judaism, Zionism posed a major challenge because it put the hitherto utopian-spiritual Land of Israel at the center of its political efforts, without being itself a religious movement. Rather, Zionism presented itself as one of the secular nationalist movements of the time which responded to the growing deprivation of European Jews and emerging anti-semitism. Zionism in many ways epitomises modernity in the history of the Jews. Like other nationalisms, it stands in the tradition of secular liberalism; and also like other nationalisms of the time, it makes use of the symbols and motifs of the Jewish religious tradition and history in order to foster a national movement. This basic ambivalence provided the grounds for two competing national projects to emerge: liberal-secular as well as a religious version of Zionism.

The different reactions of Jewish believers towards Zionism mirror the types of religious reactions towards modernity described above. Ultraorthodox Jews basically adopted a rejectionist position towards the Zionist enterprise, arguing that the idea of establishing a Jewish state was a heresy. Modern Orthodoxy, instead, opted for a more adaptive strategy. They supported Zionism and a modern lifestyle, but insisted that a Jewish state should be designed and run according to Jewish religious norms and principles (Ravitzky 1996). Modern Orthodoxy soon became the platform of a religiously-motivated nationalism which is known under the labels ‘religious Zionism’ or the ‘national-religious’ camp (Wald 2002, 112). Thus, the religious camp is divided between religious non-Zionist parties and religious Zionist parties (Hazan 2000, 113).

Avraham Itzhak HaCohen Kook, the first chief rabbi in the *Yishuv*,<sup>17</sup> was the prime inspirational source for religious Zionism.<sup>18</sup> His theology centered around a distinctive concept of holiness. While other rabbinical traditions viewed holiness as essentially linked to the observance of the *Thora* by individual believers (Shilhav 2001), Kook assigned an inherent holiness to the Jewish people and the Land of Israel as a whole. “Cooperation with secular Zionism was sanctified, redeeming the land was holy, and the forthcoming Jewish state would be an ideal one. Moreover, the Rav also instilled a messianic idea by defining the process that was taking place in the Land of Israel as the beginning of redemption” (Sandler 1993, 154f). By applying this theological argument to the emerging reality of Zionist settlement in Palestine, secular Zionist ideology was turned into a divine instrument in achieving the redemption of the Jewish people. This transfer of theological thought to politics serves as an example for how religion affects the temporal world by *what it says*.

But religious Zionism played only a minor role during the pre-state period, as well as in the first two decades of the new state. Instead, the majority of European secular immigrants, represented by David Ben Gurion’s labor party, formed the social and political establishment in Israel and steered the country’s course. In order to secure the internal stability of the deeply fragmented Israeli society, the secular-socialist leadership reached out to both religious Zionists and non-Zionists. They accommodated the non-Zionists by assuring them that public life in the

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<sup>17</sup> The pre-state Jewish community in mandatory Palestine.

<sup>18</sup> For an overview of Kook’s theology and his role in religious Zionism see also Gruenwald 1996, Ravitzky 1996, Shilhav 2001.

State of Israel would be arranged according to Jewish religious precepts.<sup>19</sup> This so-called ‘status quo-agreement’ became the principle of cooperation between the secular and the religious non-Zionist elites.

With the religious Zionists, the secular elite established what has been called the ‘historical partnership’: “The partnership was based on a coalition between the main socialist party and the main religious Zionist party, even when the latter was not needed” (Hazan 2000, 116). Part of this arrangement allowed the religious Zionists to have a say in many domestic decisions and to establish a religious branch of state-sponsored education and social institutions. In exchange, the national-religious leaders refrained from engaging in foreign policy. Cohen/Susser argue that the otherwise majoritarian Israeli democracy displayed strong consociational elements in its regulation of religion-state relations, following a political style of “concessions, compromises, deference, and creative ambiguities” (Cohen/Susser 2000, xii; cf Hazan 2000). The aim was to prevent rifts in the fragile structure of Israeli society. Until the 1970s, the National Religious Party regularly held at least two ministerial posts under successive Labor governments.

### *Israel after the June-War: The Capture of Biblical Landscapes*

The period of consociational politics during the early years of the state began to break down after the June war of 1967, when the Israeli army captured the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. 1967 marks a “momentous turning point in the history of the Jewish state” (Sandler 1993, 141). Following the sweeping victory of the Israel Defense Forces, leading figures in the governing Labor party under Levi Eshkol believed that parts of the conquered territories could be handed back to the Arab states in exchange for the acknowledgement of Israel’s right of existence.<sup>20</sup> But only a decade later a coalitional government made up of right-wing nationalist and religious parties considered the West Bank and the Gaza strip to be integral parts of the Land of Israel and rejected the ‘Land for Peace’ formula. In addition to the hitherto existing cleavages in Israeli society (Jews and Arabs; socio-economic, secular, and religious Jews; Ashkenazi and Sephardi), a new cleavage focusing on the territories

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<sup>19</sup> This comprises the Sabbath as a day of rest, the observation of Jewish dietary laws in public institutions, religious jurisdiction in personal status matters, and the maintenance of a separate religious educational sector.

<sup>20</sup> Other parts, of course, favored and promoted the occupation or even annexation of the territories.



emerged: the division between ‘hawks’ and ‘doves’ which “would soon become the dominant dimension of party competition in Israel” (Hazan 2000, 125).

The 1967 war dramatically changed the entire Israeli society as well as the religious Zionist camp in particular. Until 1967, the state had existed within arbitrarily drawn borders, resulting from the armistice agreement in 1949. But the 1967 war added to Israel those territories that constituted the core of the biblically promised land: Judea, Samaria, and East Jerusalem with the Temple Mount, the holiest place in Judaism. What happened to religious Zionism in the wake of the 1967 war might be described as the transformation of an adaptive religious movement that basically stood for priestly politics into an extremist group that aimed at winning a sort of ‘cosmic war’ (Juergensmeyer 1993) over territories deemed sacred and essential in bringing about the redemption of the Jewish people. Now that the biblical heartland was under the control of the Jewish State, religious Zionism shifted its focus towards the future of these occupied territories. “With a magical wand in hand, the few heirs of Rav Kook were all of a sudden able to point out in his writings the cornerstones upon which a new messianic ideology could be built” (Gruenwald 1996, 101). The successful military campaign was interpreted as a divine act in order to bring home the Jewish people to the promised land.

Kook’s son, Tsvi Yehuda Kook spearheaded the transformation of his father’s dialectical mysticism into a positivistic, messianic ideology. Tsvi Yehuda Kook headed the *yeshiva* that his father had founded in Jerusalem, *Merkas ha Rav*, which became central in the diffusion of the new ideology. The spiritual leaders and rabbis of *Gush Emunim* (Bloc of the Faithful), the fundamentalist settler movement that emerged from the national religious camp in the 1970s, all came from the ambit of *Merkas ha Rav*. From the mid-70s onwards, a growing number of *yeshivot* in the spirit of Kook’s theology were founded in Israel proper, as well as in the occupied territories. The separate religious educational branch provided the infrastructural basis to spread the national-religious ideology to large portions of the Israeli public. Despite its minority position, the settlement movement succeeded in establishing itself as an important actor in Israeli politics.

The attractiveness of the religious settlement movement in part stemmed from an identity crisis that prevailed within the young generation of the national religious camp prior to the 1967 war. In the eyes of the Ultraorthodox, the religious Zionists failed to qualify as true Jewish believers, since they supported the secular state; and from the perspective of the secular elite, they

were too religious to be a serious partner in state and society.<sup>21</sup> After 1967, the idea of Erez Israel gave the young guard of the national religious movement the opportunity to combine nationalism and religion in a new enterprise. The younger generation of religious Zionists also took over the leadership of the National Religious Party, which as a consequence became more closely associated with the hawkish position on territorial concessions. The project to settle the occupied territories helped to overcome the identity crisis by reproducing the ideology of the secular Zionist pioneers of the first generation, the *chaluzim*, but this time in a religious fashion. This new ideology has been called “territorial religion,” a term that captures the significance of the Land of Israel for the religious and political worldview of the Jewish settlers:

For many, territory has become the very core element of their ideology, having replaced other religious precepts as the foundation stone around which their religious and national affiliation is based. Their inherent ‘right’ to settle the West Bank is seen as part of a Divine process, of which pre-1967 Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 were stages through which abstract and metaphysical notions of space have been transformed into concrete notions of statehood following two thousand years of exile and territorial dislocation, and through which the ‘homeland’ territory has returned to its ‘rightful owner’, and been ‘liberated’ from foreign control. (Newman 2001, 241)

Such a religiously extremist view of the occupied territories excludes the possibility to negotiate rationally a solution that is based on concessions and compromise. In contrast, the majority of the Israeli public always showed their readiness to make concessions on the territorial question in exchange for peace and security.

### *The Power of the Small Parties: the 1990s*

In the 1990s, the region embarked on a peace process that seemed to pave the road for a negotiated resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The situation in the Middle East was no longer embedded in the superpowers’ global rivalry. This opened up a unique opportunity for direct negotiations between the conflict parties under the auspices of the former Cold War enemies, in particular the United States (Neff 1995, Krell 2004). These advantageous international conditions were crucial in putting the liberal, secular norms and preferences back on the map,

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<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the Labor Party supported the national religious movement’s drive to settle the occupied territories because it matched their plans.

dwarfing the religious-nationalist ideology. “Land for Peace” was the formula of the day, summarising the political vision of the governing Labor Party under Itzhak Rabin as well as of the war-weary Israeli public in the 1990s.<sup>22</sup> Barnett shows how Rabin tried to reframe the Israeli identity and the meaning of the occupation, thereby drawing explicitly on liberal, democratic norms and values. “Rabin, in short, consistently framed the settlements as holding hostage Israel’s future peace and prosperity and as depriving Israel of its Zionist and liberal identity” (Barnett 2002, 74). This interpretation of the conflict displays clearly the utilitarian and normative liberal preferences that underlie the democratic peace thesis.<sup>23</sup> Rabin’s ruling Labor party identified peace, welfare, and a decidedly liberal-democratic Zionist identity as the normative basis of the Jewish state and attempted to mobilise support for the peace process. The prospect of peace infused hope and even enthusiasm in the left camp of Israeli politics and beyond, but for the religious Zionists and the settler movement, who had placed the territory at the center of their religious ideology and identity, the plan to give land for peace was perceived as an existential threat. “The settlers and the religious community were up in arms, frantic and angered by his [Rabin’s] assault on their positions and core values” (Barnett 2002, 79). This embittered opposition to the liberal interpretation of Israel’s identity and to the peace process found its most tragic expression in the assassination of Rabin in 1995. The assassin, Yigal Amir, was a law student at the religious-conservative Bar Ilan-University and came from the religious Zionist camp.

The rift between religious nationalists and liberal secularists deepened during the 1990s (Hazan 2000, 127–133). The hitherto well-functioning consociational arrangements that had kept the relationship between religious and secular citizens in a balance gradually broke apart. This type of democratic regulation only works in fragmented societies that are characterised by cross-cutting cleavages (Cohen/Susser, 2002). In Israel, such cleavages existed between Jews and Arabs, religious and secular, Sephardi and Ashkenazi, left and right, hawks and doves, pioneers and new immigrants. The most important consociational element in Israeli politics was the regu-

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<sup>22</sup> See the excellent annual surveys of public opinion on national security, conducted by the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies. For the early 90s compare, e.g., Arian 1994.

<sup>23</sup> The tension between a liberal, democratic and secular conception of the State of Israel and a religious ethno-national one was reflected in a heated academic debate. See Gavison 1999, Kimmerling 1999, Smooha 1997, Yiftachel 1999. The main question discussed was whether Israel could be a Jewish *and* a democratic state as encapsulated in the Basic Laws.

lar inclusion of the small religious parties in the government, even if they were not needed to form a coalition in numerical terms.

But from the 1970s onwards, the religious parties got more interested in foreign and security policy, and called off the tacit agreement that had obliged them to keep out of this field of politics. In the 1990s, even the Ultraorthodox began to revise their political role. They no longer confined themselves to domestic issues, which are immediately related to their communities' needs, but gradually adopted the hawkish positions of the religious Zionist camp on the territorial question (Wald 2002). This convergence of views relating to security and foreign policy among the religious parties is mirrored by a convergence of political positions in the secular public. As a consequence, "hawkishness, religiosity, Sephardi origin, relatively depressed economic status, and lower educational attainments constitute one broad electoral-ideological constituency, and dovishness, secularity, Ashkenazi origin, relatively comfortable economic status, and higher educational attainments form the other" (Cohen/Susser 2002, 62). The former cross-cutting cleavages have become overlapping ones that bear a considerable potential for deepened domestic tensions as well as for a deterioration of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

These changes in the ideological landscape coincided with a fundamental transformation of the Israeli party system. In 1977, the Likud party for the first time won the elections, ending 30 years of political dominance by Labor. The religious camp welcomed this new constellation in Israeli politics. "Power sharing between a nationalist ruling party and the religious parties proved both more natural and politically potent" (Frisch/Sandler 2004, 83). Moreover, Prime Minister Menachem Begin supported Gush Emunim's settlement drive, though he did not give in to the Gush's opposition to the removal of settlements in the Sinai following the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement.

The new constellation of two almost equally strong parties competing for power benefited the small religious parties. Their inclusion into the governing coalitions now became a necessity instead of a consociational goodwill gesture. Being aware of this advantageous position, the small religious parties had the opportunity to 'blackmail' the big parties. They regularly attained a powerful position within the government coalitions disproportionate to their electoral gains (Hazan 2000). In many successive governments, for example, the National Religious Party controlled the Ministry of Housing and Construction, which led to significant increases in fund-

ing for the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, thereby contributing directly to the persistence of the conflict with the Palestinians. In contrast, Rabin was the first Prime Minister who abstained from inviting the religious parties into the government “in order to diminish the role of religion in foreign policy” (Frisch/Sandler 2004, 84). But his successor, Binyamin Netanjahu, put together a national-religious coalition that supported his hawkish policies towards the Palestinians. In fact, Netanjahu’s victory in the 1996 elections was largely brought about by the broad support of the religious public. By the late 1990s, the peace process, which had raised so many hopes, was buried under renewed hostility, mistrust, and finally a new escalation of violence.

### 3. Conclusions

Religion is not an independent cause of conflict in and between states. But it can be an important intervening variable that shapes the conflict behavior of the parties involved. This diagnosis does not apply only to non-democratic states. Rather, the openness of democratic political systems give religious actors the chance to actively and legally pursue their political goals. In this respect, religious Zionism has been quite influential in Israel’s course of politics towards the Palestinians. After 1967, the national-religious zealots carved out a political theology that gave a religiously-inspired meaning to the conquest of the Palestinian territories. Based on a highly selective reading of the Jewish tradition which singled out the settling of the Land of Israel as the prime precept of Judaism, religious Zionists provided a powerful alternative interpretation of the situation at hand which challenged the prevailing secular Labor party establishment. The competition between these two rival conceptions of nation and state, and their respective interpretations of the conflict, became most visible during the peace process in the 1990s. While Rabin’s Labor party based its commitment to the peace process on decidedly liberal secular norms and values, as hypothesised by democratic peace theory, the religious Zionist camp’s opposition was motivated by a completely different normative mindset which centered around a messianic theology. Religious Zionism, therefore, shaped Israeli politics by *what it said*.

Apart from framing the territorial issue in religious terms, the religious Zionist camp was also influential as a political actor – by *what it did*. First, religious nationalists spearheaded the settlement of the occupied territories. They were the first to set up communities in the West

Bank.<sup>24</sup> Second, they utilised the mechanisms and power constellations of Israel's political system, which led to their regular involvement in the governing coalitions. And third, they took to the street, protesting fervidly against any territorial concessions. The latest wave of protest against the disengagement has shown once again the strength and determination of the religious extremists.

In sum, religious Zionism has in fact been an intervening factor between the causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the choice of conflict behavior. In particular, they promoted the settlement process and deepened hostility towards the Palestinians. But – and again the disengagement serves as an example – religion is neither an independent cause of the conflict, nor does it determine entirely the course of action taken by the Israeli government. Despite the fierce protests and resistance against the evacuation of Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank, the state institutions have finally managed to accomplish the disengagement as planned by the Sharon government. The example shows the limits of religious politics. The Israeli society which is highly polarised on the question of religion does not allow for an absolute predominance of religious norms and preferences in politics; yet the ambivalent character of the Zionist project, combining religious and liberal secular elements, is very responsive to the intervening interpretative power of politicised religious actors.

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<sup>24</sup> The creation of new settlements followed a certain pattern. In the majority of cases, the settlers would set up a community without permission by the government, which then legitimised the settlement *ex post*.

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